



Inchon

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8. Social History/Ports and Labor

C. Port Cities

“INCHEON, PORT CITY OF SOUTH KOREA”

Other entries: INCHON, CHEMULP’O

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Located along muddy marshes and modest rice fields between surrounding hills, Incheon’s first encounters with the outside world were somewhat painful: the Korean court there executed nine French priests (1866) as Christians were persecuted in Korea, and American ships twice attacked this harbor to avenge the General Sherman incident near Pyongyang (1871). At the opening of its port by the “Pyongja Treaty of Amity” (1883), which allowed the entry of Westerners into Korea, Incheon (before called Chemulp’o) was a small fishing village of 4,700 dwellers. Before and during Japan’ invasion of Korea (1910-1945), Incheon was planned as a new town and a gateway to Seoul, the country’s capital city, mainly by foreign settlers (mostly Japanese, but also Chinese, American and European). Its lack of land infrastructures was improved with the Kyongin Road (1899), which marked the origin of land transport in Korea, and the Kyonginson Railway (1900) which finally crossed the Han River (1917). Japanese pressures on Korean Government focused on developing load center function between Southern and Northern peninsula, through land reclamation (30% of Incheon’s current territory has been reclaimed from the sea), waterfront and port development (bridge to Wolmi Island in 1904; five-year plan 1906-1912 to secure and

enlarge the port). Related economic developments were based on rice cleaning and brewery (1883-1910), weaving and milling (1911-1930), heavy industry and ammunitions (1931-1945), reconstruction of manufacturing industries (1945-1960). The “Open Port Traffic Act” (1961) and completion of the 29.5 km Kyongin Expressway (1968) confirmed its role as Seoul’s gateway, along a development corridor called ‘Kyongin Industrial Region’. However Incheon, the leading Korean port until 1945, located at the edge of the country’s half population and wealth, will not fully profit from this exceptional situation, and is rapidly facing decline as a port for a number of reasons. Some of them are purely technical: officials from Ports of the world (1962) reported that “at low water the coastline becomes a mud bank, and small tugs or loaded lighters are unable to approach landing stages. It is necessary for many vessels themselves to be anchored approx. 3 miles offshore”. Moreover, its physical disadvantages (9m draught, 10.2m tidal range), combined to high congestion rates and low capacity potential that lead to saturation, anchor Incheon far under Pusan (respectively 7.5 and 90% of Korea’s containerized throughput in 2000). Above all it suffers from being too close to the 38th parallel: invasion threats avoid the concentration of flows and infrastructures that could be captured by North Korean forces. This helps to explain the spectacular development of Pusan, away from Seoul but closer to global regular shipping lines. As a city and until the 1990s, Incheon enjoys the highest growth of industrial employment and rural immigration but, despite a population of approximately 2.5 million inhabitants (2004), fails to diversify its economy given the proximity of Seoul, which centralizes the nation’s core businesses and tertiary activities. Incheon remains centered on iron, steel, coke, light metals, plate-glass, textiles, chemicals, and lumber, most of them being small and medium sized companies. Korea’s compressed and selective growth has led to disjointed land-use problems and environmental degradation in Korean port cities. The extensive use of available and somewhat recent quays (a majority was destroyed during the Korean War, 1950-1953) prevents any Europe-

oriented waterfront redevelopment. Recent projects aim at reinforcing its hub function in the Yellow Sea Region, with ‘North Incheon Port’ (1995-2011), ‘Incheon Container Terminal’ (2004) by Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) to sustain Sino-Korean trading and ‘Kyongin Canal’ (1997-2011) to reduce trucking with Seoul. Ongoing projects like Incheon International Airport (2001), Songdo Inpia (2006) and Incheon Free Zone (2020) are shaping Incheon’s ‘Penta-Port’ identity, supporting Korea’s ambition to become North-East Asia’s logistic and economic hub. Incheon case also reflects the increasing role of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in current Korean development as a mean to sustain and improve modernity (93% of Incheon’s project are foreign-funded). With the recent opening of North Korea, and some shortsea feedering with Nampo since 2004, Incheon may fully go back to its traditional gateway function at the center of a possible unified peninsula.

Inchon holds the “Landing Operation Memorial Hall” to the memory of General MacArthur, and the “Munhaksanseong Fortress” dating back to the Paekche Kingdom (0-660 A.D.).

[703 words]

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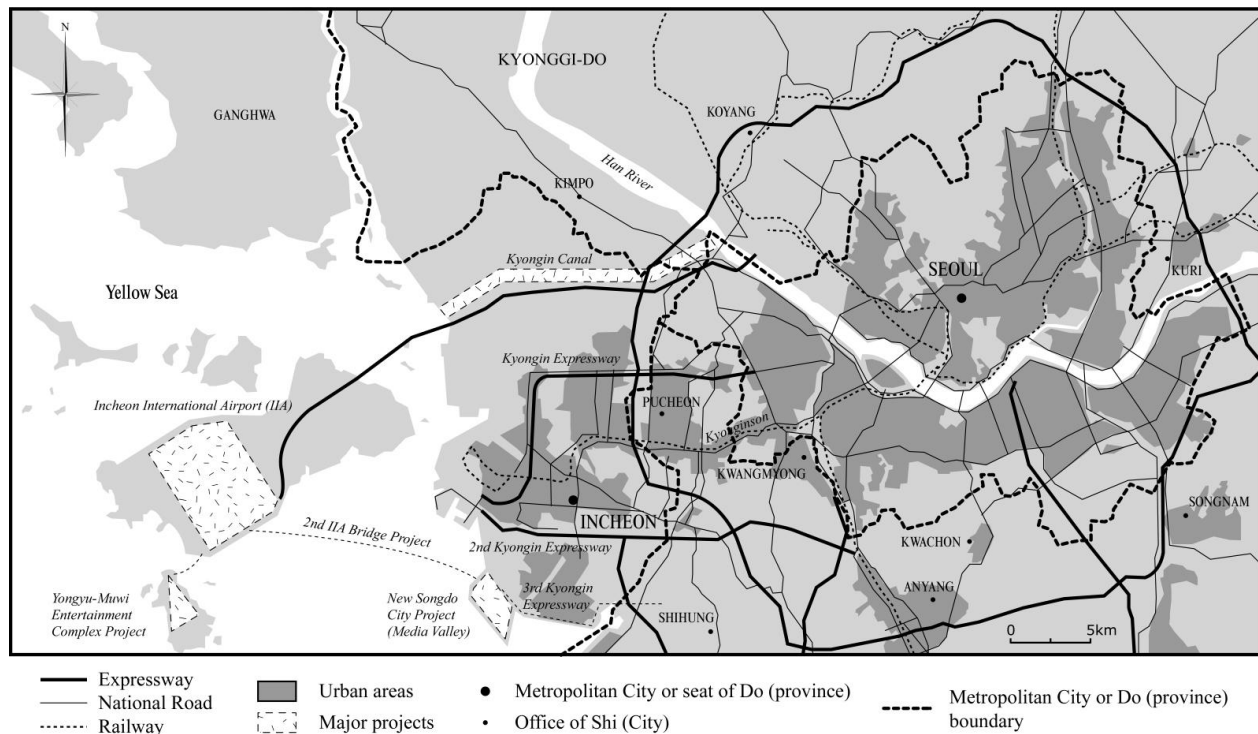


Figure 1: The Kyongin region, major projects and infrastructures around 2004.

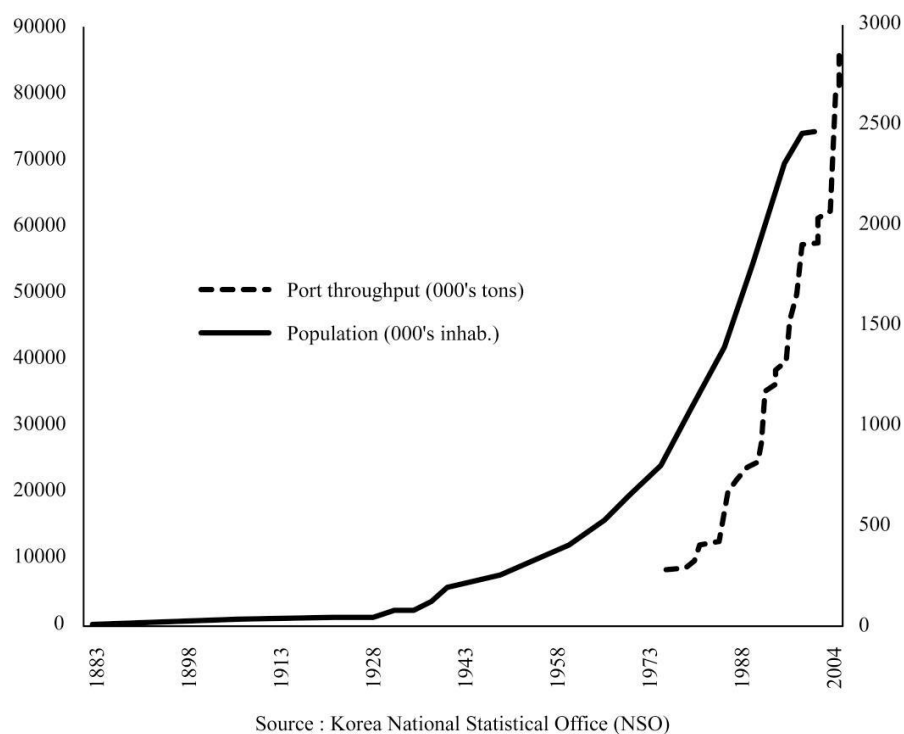


Figure 2: Evolution of population and port throughput in Incheon, 1883-2004.